

Safe driving tips for Thanksgiving travel

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Planning to hit the road for the Thanksgiving holiday to visit with family and friend? You won't be alone. The AAA forecasts 42.5 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, marking a 4-percent increase over last year. Before you embark, consider these tips to help prepare you and your car for whatever challenges might be faced on the road.

1. Fuel up. Don't head out on a long trip without a full tank of gas. In addition to topping off the tank, also check fluids and tire pressures before you leave.

2. Be prepared. Bring supplies in the event of an accident or medical issue. Stock your car with an [emergency kit](#)—especially a flashlight, blanket, first-aid kit, and some basic tools. Also, bring water and extra snacks, just in case.

3. Pack smart. Check your vehicle's load capacity to make sure you aren't putting too much weight in the car. On most new cars, the total weight you can carry is printed on a placard (sticker) inside the driver's door jamb. This load rating includes all the passengers and cargo. Also, make sure your gear is packed properly and will not be a hazard if you stop short.

4. Track it. A portable [GPS navigation system](#) will help you get where you're going, making it easy to find gas stations or restaurants along the way. Traffic-enabled devices can warn of roadway congestion, and all units can assist in finding an alternate route. Also, a navigator can help direct emergency services to your location, should something happen. (See "[Video: Don't let a GPS navigator steer you wrong.](#)")

5. Kid prep. If you're driving with kids, make sure you pack enough snacks, water, games, videos/DVDs, and music to keep them occupied during your journey. (See our "[10 tips for a stress-free road trip with kids](#)" for more advice.)

6. Traveling with pets. Be sure to secure your pets, either with harnesses and seat belts or by placing them in a crate. Animals can be a dangerous distraction when driving and

physical threat in an accident, should they travel about the cabin or escape onto a busy motorway. Bring water, food, toys, leash, and clean-up supplies—you never know.

7. Be patient. During busy travel times, expect to hit traffic. It may make sense to drive late at night or early in the morning to avoid the rush and ensure you get to your destination on time and with minimal stress. A GPS device with traffic information and an exit guide can help you navigate around congestion and help find desired pit stop locations.

8. Don't be distracted. Cell phones and driving don't mix, so if you need to send a message or make a call, hand your phone to a passenger or pull over. It's not worth risking your life or others on the road.

9. Buckle up. Always use your seat belt, make sure children are properly secured in a car seat and are seated in the rear seats if they are under 13.

10. Watch for weather. If you're driving in wintry weather, make sure you clear off the snow and ice for better visibility, allow for longer braking distances, and reduce your speed. (Check out our [winter driving guide](#) if you are headed to a snowy location.)

11. Keep control. There could be a variety of scenarios on the road, but if you stay calm and be prepared you can get through any challenge. Check out our story "[Surviving the worst-case scenarios](#)" for more on driving in fog, snow, or if your car has brake failure, overheats, or your tire blows out.

And finally, be safe and patient. Have a happy Thanksgiving!

—*Liza Barth*



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